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Seven on Cyprus secrets charges

Seven young British servicemen were yesterday remanded in custody at Bow Street magistrates' court on charges under the Official Secrets Act. They had been flown in from Cyprus, where they were based.

Six of the men were accused of communicating information useful to an enemy. The seventh faced a lesser charge of failing to take reasonable care of classified information.

The seven, all in their early or mid-twenties, are members of 9 Signal Regiment, a joint service organization based at the Akrotiri-Episkopi British military complex in south-west Cyprus.

Yesterday's two minute court hearing followed a two-month investigation by British intelligence officers into possible security leaks among servicemen on the Mediterranean island.

While refusing to comment on the allegations yesterday, on the ground that they were a matter for the courts, a Ministry of Defence spokesman said that a thorough investigation into the alleged breaches of security was continuing. It was too early to say what action, if any, would be recommended.

The British bases in Cyprus, which are manned by more than 4,000 servicemen, mainly Army personnel, are of considerable strategic significance. The communications centre at Akrotiri and Episkopi is responsible for gathering much of the diplomatic and military intelligence available in Turkey and the Middle East.

The seven servicemen who were remanded in the custody of the police until next Thursday were: Senior Aircraftsman Geoffrey Jones, aged 20; SAC Adam Lightowler, aged 21; SAC Wayne Kriehn, 20; SAC Christopher Payne, 24; SAC Gwynfer Owen, 21; Signaller Martin Tuffy, 22 and Signaller David Hardman, 26. Only Payne is married.

Jones, Lightowler, Kriehn, Payne and Owen are each charged under Section 1(1)(c) of the Official Secrets Act, 1911 that between November 1, 1983, and February 7, 1984, for a purpose prejudicial to the safety or interests of the state, they communicated to another person information which was calculated to be, or might have been, or was intended to be, directly or indirectly useful to an enemy.

Tuffy faces a similar charge under the same section of the Act but referring to a day between January 9, 1984, and February 7, 1984.

Hardman is charged under Section 2(1)(c) of the Official Secrets Act that between July 1, 1982, and August 24, 1982, he failed to take reasonable care of, or so conducted himself as to endanger the safety of, classified information under his charge.